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DE RUEHSK #0588/01 1561245
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4503
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 1170

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000588

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: TEN PLUS APPROVES TWO-YEAR STRATEGY

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (U) Summary: The Ten Plus Coalition's Political Council on May 22 approved a two-year plan aimed at removing Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko and promoting democracy. The plan concentrates most of its energy in the "For Freedom" movement, which calls for pro-democratic civil society groups and NGOs to join forces with the Ten Plus. Although the plan states that the Ten Plus is to abide by resolutions set forth by the October Congress of Democratic Forces, former Coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich and his team appear to be assuming the executive position in implementing the plan and controlling the "For Freedom" movement. United Civic Party (UCP) leader Anatoly Lebedko abstained from voting, fearing the plan would weaken the UCP's internal power structure and Lebedko's position within the Coalition. End Summary.

"For Freedom" Priorities

12. (U) On May 22 the Ten Plus Coalition's Political Council approved the opposition's two-year strategy aimed at removing Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko from power and promoting democratic reform via the "For Freedom" campaign. (Note: The strategy, in Belarusian, is located on Milinkevich's website <http://by.milinkevich.org>.) The campaign's political objective is to shape an independent and democratic Belarus, prevent Belarus' political and economic isolation, and ensure separate legislative, executive, and judicial branches that "honor freedom and human dignity." The strategy calls for democratic presidential and parliamentary elections and peaceful means to force Lukashenko to resign.

Mobilization

13. (U) The "For Freedom" campaign begins with opposition forces identifying and finding solutions to the potential economic and social consequences following price hikes in imported Russian energy. The opposition is then to inform Belarusians about the potential crisis and mobilize the public should the government fail to alleviate the problems.

The Troops

14. (U) The two-year strategy relies on three groups to implement the "For Freedom" campaign. The first group includes the political parties and civil-society

organizations of the United Democratic Forces (UDF) that worked "effectively" during the 2006 presidential campaign and have the "knowledge," "motivated members," "administrative resources," and an "established information distribution system." The second group is former Ten Plus presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich-who, according to the strategy, "must be recognized as the alternative to Lukashenko"--and his campaign team. The final group includes entrepreneurs, students, contract employees, religious groups, and others who participated in the elections, but were not affiliated with the "official" opposition. The strategy acknowledges that the main obstacle in working with the last group would be transforming its "protest energy" into preparedness and coordination (translation: keeping them under the UDF's control).

New Members

¶5. (U) The strategy encourages pro-democratic individuals and groups to work together with the Ten Plus Coalition. Leaders of democratic political parties would be invited to join the UDF and civil society representatives (i.e., Protestants, intelligentsia, and business circle initiatives) are invited to serve as advisors. Chairpersons of civil NGOs that support the "For Freedom" campaign but are not represented at the Political Council would be invited to a monthly civil forum.

Continued Support

¶6. (U) The campaign stresses the need to provide "rapid and real" support to victims of GOB repression. The opposition must continue demanding the release of all political prisoners, the suspension of politically motivated criminal cases, and access to independent press and alternative sources of information.

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Defining the Leadership

¶7. (U) The two-year strategy directs the UDF leadership to abide and operate in accordance to resolutions passed by the Congress of Democratic Forces, but the Political Council (currently headed by Milinkevich) would implement the "For Freedom" campaign. Although the plan orders the Political Council to elect a leader and committee members by June 15, it is construed to give Milinkevich a clear advantage, allowing him to transform his established network of regional and local election campaign headquarters into branches of the "For Freedom" executive committee.

A Unanimous Vote(Nearly

¶8. (SBU) Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) deputy Ales Yanukevich on May 24 told Poloff that UCP deputy Aleksandr Dobrovolsky, Milinkevich campaign team member Viktor Korniyenko, and leader of the BPF Vintsuk Vyachorka drafted the strategy. The Political Council reviewed it twice before passing it almost unanimously. According to Yanukevich, UCP leader Anatoly Lebedko abstained because he feared the plan would weaken the UCP's power structure and, most importantly, his high position within the UDF. The Political Council voted down Lebedko's motion to hold another Congress of Democratic Forces to launch the "For Freedom" campaign and define the Coalition's leadership.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) The two-year strategy could be a step forward in promoting opposition unity, although some observers complain

the strategy should have been adopted much earlier if the opposition wanted to capitalize on the momentum of the 2006 presidential elections. Milinkevich told Ambassador on May 22 it was disappointing it took the Ten Plus two months after the elections to formulate a strategy and reach out to civil society and other pro-democratic groups. The clauses that more or less consolidate Milinkevich's position as leader of the Political Council and, hence, the Coalition could fan the flames of the power struggle between UCP's Lebedko and Milinkevich, as it is clear Lebedko does not entirely agree with the adopted strategy and may try to strike out on his own. Such a division would damage opposition unity at a time when they need to be consolidating and cooperating. Lebedko on May 23 told Ambassador, however, that he had no intention of leaving the Coalition and simply wants to strengthen the strategy by making it more specific and action-oriented than hortatory. Our constant message to both Milinkevich and Lebedko and the opposition as a whole is to remain unified and not weaken themselves by divisions.

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